broadband, Internet enabled kiosks termed as Common Service Centres (CSCs) in rural areas of the country. These Centres would be opened in the ratio of 1 CSC for every 6 Census villages in a State through Public Private Partnership. These Centres would provide a mix of Government and Private Services in rural areas. The Centres once established would provide better communication facilities to citizens in rural areas.

VMNOs to Indian Telecom Operators

2185. SHRIDHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that Virtual Mobile Network Operators (VMNOs) service is currently being offered in European and US markets involving marketing and branding outfit through mutual agreements;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government would also consider permitting VMNOs to Indian telecom operators to have alliance with foreign companies in order to complete with international market; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Sir, according to consultancy firm Takashi Mobile, website of OFCOM (Telecom Regulator of United Kingdom) and information available on internet, Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) are operational in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Norwey, France, Germany, United Kingdom and United States. MVNO business models are in the process of being launched in some other countries, namely Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, The Baltics, Chile and Austria.

(c) and (d) Mobile Virtual Network Operator is a new kind of service and as per Section 11 of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act, 1997, the Government is required to seek recommendations of TRAI on need and timing for introduction of new service providers and regarding terms and conditions of license to be granted to such service providers. As on date, no decision in this regard has been taken by the Government.

New Telecom Licenses

2186. SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the effect that existing Telecom companies have predicted that new telecom licenses will collapse in three years;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) whether this suggests that existing incumbent operators have significant market power to prevent growth of competition in the sector; and

(d) the steps Government and the Regulator are taking to ensure that market power of existing operators do not prevent free and fair competition?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to(d) Subsequent to acceptance of recommendations dated 28.08.2007 of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), *inter-alia,* that there should be no cap on the number of access provider in any service area, 120 new Unified Access Services (UAS) licences have been granted so far. Viewing the present tele-density of around 25, there are ample opportunities abailable to the new telecom licensees. Any such forecast by the existing telecom licensee(s) that new telecom licensees will collapse in three years, appears to be only speculative.

Broadband Connectivity

2187. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that broadband connectivity is very essential for the development of the country as a knowledge based society;

(b) if so, the steps taken and proposed to be taken by Government thereon;

(c) the details of the broadband subscribers in the country as on 31 st December 2007, State-wise;

(d) whether China is far ahead of our country in broadband connectivity; and

(e) if so, the steps proposed to be taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir. Government is very much aware that broadband connectivity is very essential for the development the country as a knowledge based society.

(b) Some of the major steps taken and proposed to be taken by the Government to proliferate broadband in the country are given in Statement-I *(See* below).

(c) There were 30,19,521 broadband subscribers as on 31 st December 2007. State-wise details of Broadband Subscribers are given in Statement-N *(See* below).

(d) As per the information available on Internet, China is ahead of our country in broadband connectivity.

(e) Steps for proliferation of broadband have been summarized in Part (b) above.

Statement-I

Details regarding some of the major steps taken and proposed to be taken to proliferate broadband in the country

1. Broadband policy has been announced by the Government during 2004 for accelerated growth of Broadband applications, contributing growth of GDP and enhancement in quality of life through societal applications including tele-education, tele-medicine, e-governance, entertainment as well as employment generation.
2. In order to bring provisioning of broadband connectivity to rural areas under the purview of Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), the Indian Telegraph Rules